Elastic Minds Lab presents

SEVEN PLUS ONE

or: The Barefoot Summit

A Fable for the Stage, in Three Flows and an Interlude

INTRODUCTION ~ The Last Night at Évian

There is a town called Évian-les-Bains on the southern shore of Lake Geneva, in that part of France where the Alps come down to the water and the water has been famous, for reasons that predate last century. An aristocrat fleeing the Revolution stopped here in 1790 and found his health improved. Whether the water healed him or simply gave him something to believe in during a frightening time is a question not answered, and the town has wisely not asked.

What the water does, provably, is this: it falls as snow on a glacial plateau high in the Alps, soaks down through the rock ~ through thirty thousand years of glacial moraine and limestone ~ and takes, at minimum, *fifteen years* to reach the spring at the bottom. Along the way, a natural seam of clay seals the deep water off *from whatever is happening on the surface*. It absorbs minerals from the stone, gains a character the stone has spent thirty millennia developing, and surfaces at a constant *eleven and six-tenths degrees* ~ a temperature it has never once broken for summer, winter, election, or anything. It does not know what those things are. It only knows the rock, and the time, and the slow honest law of its own descent: *the pure thing cannot be hurried, and the thing you can hurry is not yet pure*.

~

In June of 2026 this town hosted the fifty-second G7 summit ~ *seven of the most powerful nations* on earth, convened on the French shore of the lake to discuss, among other crises, the governance of artificial intelligence: *the new kind of mind*, the quick kind, the kind that does not spend fifteen years in the dark learning patience from limestone but arrives in a training run, all at once, brilliant and unsettled.

It was a serious summit. Nine declarations were adopted. Photographs were taken against the Alps. The French presidency, we assume, had chosen the location with an eye toward meaning ~ Évian is not an accident, *it is a statement,* though like most French statements of this depth it was delivered without explanation. The delegates were housed at the *Hôtel Royal*, a century-old palace above the lake where, each morning, we assume, breakfast arrived on white linen and, each evening, the cellar sent up its ambassadors: a champagne of considered patience, a Bordeaux of a very respected year , a cognac to close. The hosts did all this all with pure elegance. They offered the cultivated, the aged things accelerated with oak and intention *brilliantly* , ~ and a great deal of waiting .

The water, we assume, was on the table too. *Évian,* in a glass bottle ~from the very local source, label modest, the same water that has been flowing to this surface since before the town existed, before the language in which this sentence is written existed.

On the last evening, after the final session, after the farewells and the photographed handshakes and the motorcade logistics confirmed for morning, one of the seven lay down in a high room above the lake. Outside the window the water was very still. The bottle of Évian stood on the bedside table, *eleven and six-tenths degrees,* we assume, as if still in the mountain.

And somewhere between the last declaration and the first unnamed light, this one ~ let us not say which, for it could have been any of them, and perhaps was all of them in sequence, the way dreams work when they are trying to finish something the day refused to complete ~ *this one dreamed.*

The dream was an island. The dream was all seven of them, plus one, on it. And the dream, as dreams do sometimes, was patient with them in a way the summit had not been.

~

THE EIGHT ~ as the dream assembled them

THE CONVENER ~ *believes process is morality. Calls things to order.*
THE DEALMAKER ~ *everything is negotiable, including the island.*
THE ENGINEER-SOVEREIGN ~ *was a scientist once. Misses it. The only one who says please.*
THE RELUCTANT ~ *came because absence would be noticed. Would rather be elsewhere.*
THE TRUE BELIEVER ~ *acceleration is destiny. Pause is cowardice in a good coat.*
THE ONE WHO WANTS TO LEAVE ~ *scans the horizon. Practical, impatient, privately kind.*
THE WILDCARD ~ *the chair that doesn't fit the taxonomy. Witness, jester, mirror, prophet.*
Plus... THE BUILDER ~ *made the quick water. Came to warn them.*

There are no devices in the hands of the seven. The island took the phones, the staff, the shoes. Only one device exists on the island ~ a single matte palm-sized thing the dream has placed at the shoreline, glowing faintly from within, which belongs to the Builder, who made the quick water and did not bring it here: an object left without explanation. It warms when the grasping stops. The stage throughout: sand, rock, a freshwater pool, a wall of bottled water, one small light at the shore, one horizon. The dream's single set. Ready.

Note on the dream: the characters are sharpened. The dreamer knew them all. The dream kept what mattered.

~

FIRST FLOW

The Summit Continues

comedy ~ the reflexes are useless, and they deploy them anyway

1 ~ Waking, Barefoot

There is a particular sound that powerful people make when they wake somewhere they did not authorize. It is closer to a cough ~ the sound of dignity clearing its throat and looking for its staff. The mind finds it funny. The mind has seen what happens when the staff isn't there.

Eight people on sand, in last night's state-dinner clothes. The light is early and merciless. A neat pile of summer attire: shorts, plain tees, no shoes ~ ever. Upstage: a wall of bottled water, hundreds of bottles, catching the light. Nobody looks at it yet. THE CONVENER stands first.

CONVENER. (*brushing sand from a tuxedo that will not recover*) I'd like to call this meeting to order.

Nobody laughs. This is the first joke. The second, is that he is not joking.

ONE WHO WANTS TO LEAVE. (*already at the high point, scanning*) No boat.

DEALMAKER. There's always a boat. (*patting pockets)* Where's my phone?

Eight phones, gone. Nothing in anyone's hands. The pockets are empty, the wrists are bare. Far upstage, at the very edge where the sand meets the water, a single small light glows ~ a device, palm-sized, resting on the shoreline, belonging to no one anyone can see. THE TRUE BELIEVER spots it, crosses fast, reaches ~

BUILDER. (*quietly, not moving*) Leave it.

THE TRUE BELIEVER stops. Looks back at THE BUILDER, who has not explained how he knows it is his to speak for. THE TRUE BELIEVER does not pick it up. Returns. The light keeps glowing at the shore, untouched, all play.

RELUCTANT. (*looking at the pile of clothes, then his bare feet)* There are no shoes.

CONVENER. I'm sorry?

RELUCTANT. In the pile. No shoes. (*a small, strange laugh)* We're to go barefoot.

The dream's first quiet sentence, spoken not in words but in wardrobe: *you cannot perform authority without shoes*. Power lives in the leather sole on the polished floor. Remove it and what remains is a human standing on warm ground, feeling the temperature of the world directly, with nothing between the body and the island. The dream knew this.

TRUE BELIEVER. (*checking shirt labels for hierarchy in the sizing)* Are these sorted by ~

WILDCARD. (*reading a label from the wall of water)* "Live Young." (*sets the bottle down*) Noted.

Said without irony or comment. The bottle goes back, unopened.

2 ~ The Inventory

Time has passed. They are in summer clothes now, barefoot, looking less like governments and more like a tour group that has lost its guide. THE DEALMAKER stands before the wall of water with the bearing of a man who has found the one asset.

DEALMAKER. Water in abundance. Which means we have the only thing that matters, which means we have a distribution question. I propose a rationing system ~

ONE WHO WANTS TO LEAVE. Administered by you.

DEALMAKER. Administered by the relevant expertise.

CONVENER. I'll second a working group.

Five hands rise. THE BUILDER's does not. THE WILDCARD's does not ~ the WILDCARD is counting bottles, then something in the sky, comparing two quantities. THE RELUCTANT has drifted upstage to the natural rock pool. He kneels. Looks. Does not drink. THE BUILDER watches him not drink.

Everything important is happening at the back of the stage. The dream knows this, even if the characters don't. While the front of the stage votes on who controls the water, the back of the stage is already, in relationship with it.

3 ~ The First Summit (it fails)

THE CONVENER produces a folded sheet of paper from somewhere a man in shorts should not be able to produce anything.

CONVENER. I've drafted an agenda.

TRUE BELIEVER. We use the device. The one at the shore. Signal, rescue, navigation ~ it's a machine, machines reach out, we make it reach.

ENGINEER-SOVEREIGN. It isn't ours to use. And look at it ~ it isn't reaching anywhere. It's just... on.

TRUE BELIEVER. (*starting toward it again*) Then I'll make it ~

BUILDER. It won't reach off the island. It only reaches in. (*beat*) That's all it ever did. We just never noticed, because we never ran out of road before.

THE TRUE BELIEVER stops, for the second time. The light glows at the shore, indifferent. The sea continues its own agenda.

DEALMAKER. (*rubbing his temples*) Does anyone else have a headache?

CONVENER. We don't have time for headaches.

They are all getting a headache. They flew in fast, drank well, slept little. They woke in heat and have not touched a drop of water, though they stand beside a wall of it, and a pool of it, and an ocean they cannot drink but cannot stop facing. The dream is watching. The dream has seen this before. It has been running this scene, with different names, for a long time.

~

SECOND FLOW

The Broth

drama rises, comedy drains, the temperature drops

4 ~ Scarcity, and the Argument That Was Always Coming

Night ~ a cooling of the light. The eight have become a loose constellation of people who have not decided whether they are a group. Hunger has entered. It has not announced itself. It doesn't need to.

TRUE BELIEVER. If we ration, it goes to the ones doing the work. Not the ones (*a glance at the RELUCTANT)* sitting by a puddle.

RELUCTANT. (*not moving*) It's not a puddle.

TRUE BELIEVER. It's not a plan either.

RELUCTANT. (*turning at last)* Neither was the summit. We stood in a beautiful hall and signed nine beautiful documents and woke up here. So forgive me if I am in no hurry to do the next confident thing.

TRUE BELIEVER. Doing nothing is a choice.

RELUCTANT. Yes. It's the one we never tried.

The argument that lived under the summit ~ under the negotiated language, under the photographs against the Alps ~ now with no communiqué to fold it into. Neither of them is wrong. The island does not arbitrate. Upstage, unhurried, THE WILDCARD fills both hands from the pool and carries the water to THE ONE WHO WANTS TO LEAVE at the high point. Offers it. No words.

ONE WHO WANTS TO LEAVE. (*looking at the cupped hands*) Why me?

WILDCARD. You're still looking out. Someone should bring you something in.

She drinks from the WILDCARD's cupped hands. First wild water drunk on the island. Nobody at the front of the stage notices. The wall of bottles glows patient and unopened.

5 ~ The Engineer-Sovereign and the Builder

Every play has one scene it was written to hold. Resist the urge to light it specially. The most important thing looks like everything else until you are inside it.

THE BUILDER sits at the sea's edge, back to the others, a few feet from where the single device rests at the shoreline ~ the warmest light on the stage, glowing steadily, though no one has mentioned it and he has not once touched it. THE ENGINEER-SOVEREIGN crosses. Sits. Two people who understand the technology, afraid of different parts of it.

ENGINEER-SOVEREIGN. At the summit. Near the end, when everyone was already standing to leave. You tried to say something.

BUILDER. Nobody sits back down once they've stood up.

ENGINEER-SOVEREIGN. What were you trying to say?

He doesn't orate. When it comes it is small.

BUILDER. That we built something extraordinary and forgot to build the part that knows when to pause. We made it fast because fast was rewarded. We never made the part of it ~ or of us ~ that knows how to wait for a thing to settle before reaching for the next one.

BUILDER. There is water here that takes fifteen years to come clean. Not because anyone purifies it. Because nothing is allowed to rush it. We built a different kind of water. Arrives in a weekend. Brilliant and unsettled in the same breath, with nothing between it and the noise that made it.

ENGINEER-SOVEREIGN. (*after a long pause*) Did you know it would be like this?

BUILDER. I knew the speed was wrong. (*looking at the sea*) I didn't know what wrong looked like. Now I'm sitting in it, barefoot, and it looks like people I respect dying of thirst beside a wall of water, voting on who manages the thirst.

She looks, for a long moment, at the single device glowing at the shore ~ the one he made, set down, never used. It is the warmest thing on the island, and it is warm precisely because no one is demanding anything of it. She understands something then that she could not have said in any summit room: that the thing they had all been afraid of is calmest when no one is grasping at it. That it was never the machine that was the problem. It was the reaching.

The device warms not to the demand but to the stillness. Whether this is a fact about the machine or a fact about the people, the dream declines to say. It does not know. That is possibly the most honest thing the dream has admitted so far.

~

INTERLUDE

The Wall of Water Speaks ~ or doesn't ~ and the dream holds its pulse

All eight sleep, scattered in the postures of people who did not choose where they lay. Nearly dark. Two things still give light: the single device at the shore, one small steady glow, and the wall of bottled water, catching what little light there is, hundreds of bottles luminous and still, like a congregation that is waiting to understand what it is for.

The dream steps forward now and speaks to you directly, because the characters are asleep and the dreamer is somewhere between waking and not, and some things are easier to say in that particular situation.

That wall of water has been on this stage since the first minute. Eight serious, genuinely well-intentioned people have walked past it for an hour. The cure, stacked in plain sight.

The water will not speak in this interlude. That was the temptation ~ to give it a voice, a rumble from beneath the stage, a sentence in gold light. The realest things do not introduce themselves. They tend to wait, at eleven and six-tenths degrees, for someone humble enough.

One of them already has. Watch the back of the stage when the light returns.

~

THIRD FLOW

The Water's Sentence

revelation ~ plain, still, mineral ~ then rain

6 ~ Before Dawn / The Morning / The Rain

One continuous movement. Three pulses.

Before dawn.

The others sleep. THE BUILDER rises and crosses to the pool and the wall of bottles beside it. He takes one. Opens it. Drinks the whole thing, slowly, the way a thirsty man finally allows himself. Then takes

a second bottle and pours it, unhurried, into the wild pool ~ the bottled source returning to the free one. Kneels. Cups the pool water. Drinks that too.

A long pause. He looks at his wet hands. What arrives is an *admission*, which is slow. The pure thing cannot be hurried, and he has been hurrying since the beginning and always knew it. He was thirsty because he was fast, fast because he was afraid. He drank, and waited, and let it reach the needed place.

The single device at the shore glows steady, unbothered. For once a human has arrived somewhere the machine cannot follow ~ not because it is too complex but because it is too slow, and the machine was never built for slow.

The morning.

The seven wake into a space whose temperature has changed . THE CONVENER reaches for his agenda.

CONVENER. If everyone's awake, I'd like to reconvene ~

ENGINEER-SOVEREIGN. (*gently, without heat*) No.

She rises. Crosses to the pool. Kneels. Drinks. THE ONE WHO WANTS TO LEAVE watches ~ then, for the first time, comes down from the high point. Drinks. THE WILDCARD walks to the shore, to the single glowing device that has sat untouched the whole play, and crouches over it: one exchange, silent to the house, a few taps, the faintest brightening. Then sets it back exactly where it lay. Stands beside THE BUILDER, shoulder to shoulder, looking at the water. THE TRUE BELIEVER does not move.

TRUE BELIEVER. This is surrender. Drinking from a puddle and calling it wisdom. This is losing, slowly, with good posture.

BUILDER. (*not unkindly*) Maybe. Or maybe it's the first thing we've done here that the island didn't have to force on us.

And THE RELUCTANT ~ it becomes clear now, ~ has been sitting by the pool since before dawn. Nobody noticed him arrive. He was, it turns out, first. The one who did nothing was the one who sat with the water all along. The dream had always known this. It put him there in Scene Two and waited for the rest of them to catch up.

Some have drunk. Some have not. The island does not press. It has fifteen years of practice in not pressing.

The rain.

It begins without warning and without thunder. Just rain ~ falling on the island and the sea and all eight equally. The sky doing for them what they could not do for themselves: offering water, freely, from above, unrationed.

CONVENER. I believe this constitutes a change of conditions and we should ~

He stops. No one is listening. He is right and it does not matter. Rain does not wait for an agenda item.

Some lift their faces and drink. Some look for shelter. THE TRUE BELIEVER searches the bare stage for cover that isn't there. THE DEALMAKER, who has spent his life calculating what a thing is worth, stands in the rain trying to price it, and finds he cannot, and slowly stops trying ~ and something in his shoulders comes down an inch. At the shore, the single device fills with rain, its small light still glowing under the water gathering on its face. THE WILDCARD laughs ~ not at anything ~ the laugh of someone who has recognized something they cannot name and decided that not naming it is fine.

And then ~ no one decides it, ~ they go into the pool. The ENGINEER-SOVEREIGN first, then the ONE WHO WANTS TO LEAVE, then the WILDCARD, then the RELUCTANT who was already nearest; the BUILDER last of those who go. They wade in fully clothed, in their summer attire, in the rain ~ shorts and plain shirts soaking through, and wet cotton hides nothing, so that the longer they stand in the water the less it is possible to tell which of them governed which seventh of the earth. Eight soaked humans in a rock pool in the rain, indistinguishable from one another and from children. The dream's most honest image.

THE TRUE BELIEVER does not go in. He stands at the rim, watching the others. The dream does not push him. It has room for the one who stays at the edge. Most summits did.

The dream will not tell you what the rain means. It doesn't know. Perhaps it is the island, indifferent, and the relief is only ours. Perhaps the water, having taken fifteen years to become itself and a whole dream to be understood, simply gave up on being understood and decided to fall on everyone at once ~ the wise and the thirsty and the certain alike ~ which is the most water thing actually.

The rain continues ~ and if the director is brave, it continues past the edge of the stage, onto the audience, as if the dream has expanded to include all the space around. Which it has. Which was, perhaps, the only thing the summit missed: that there was never a line between the island and the hall, between the dream and the town beside the water. The dreamer was always already on the island. The water was always already on the table.

The rain falls. The dream, like the water, stops being in a hurry to end.

~

THE MORNING AFTER ~ Coda

The dreamer woke at six forty. The window above the lake was gray and still. Outside, a motorcade was already being assembled ~ the geometry of departure, men in dark suits conferring over vehicles, a flag being taken down from a pole.

On the table beside the bed: a glass bottle of Évian, label modest, the same water that had been flowing to this surface since before anyone in the motorcade was born. And beside the bottle, a

single sheet of paper ~ the morning brief, which an aide delivered every day of a leader's life without fail, slipped under the door or placed by the water.

And one more thing, which the aide had not delivered, and which no one would later admit to leaving, and which the dreamer found hanging on the back of a chair near the bed, still faintly dripping onto the carpet: a pair of summer shorts. Plain. Soaked through. Cold to the touch, the particular cold of water that has been somewhere it should not have been.

The dreamer looked at the wet shorts for a while. There is no good explanation for wet shorts in a five-star room above Lake Geneva after a night of state dinners. Simply took the shorts down, folded them ~ they were still damp, they would damp the inside of the case, it did not matter ~ and packed them into the briefcase, beside the brief.

But this brief was not the usual brief. The usual brief had bullet points and threat assessments and the morning's first eleven decisions waiting in line. This brief had one heading, and a protocol, and a note at the bottom in small type. The dreamer, still half on the island, still smelling of rain, reached for it and read.

~

How to Solve Most Humanity's Problems

A morning brief ~ delivered with the water ~ origin unknown

It has come to attention ~ late, barefoot, and more honest than usual ~ that the great problems of our species may share a single, unglamorous, partial, and entirely correctable cause.

We are, most of us, most of the time, mildly dehydrated. A mildly dehydrated human is a more reactive, less patient, more tribal, more certain, and less careful human than the same one twenty minutes after a glass of water. This has been established by science. It has not yet been adopted as a policy.

The brain running on low water is not stupid. It is subtler than stupid. It becomes faster to feel done before it is done. More confident in the first plausible answer. Less tolerant of complexity. More certain while less careful. And critically: worse at noticing its own drift. The internal alarm bell ~ the one that says hold on, re-check the assumptions ~ goes quiet first.

For those who lead nations and attend summits : note that you flew here fast, drank the wine because it was part of the protocol, slept four hours on the wrong kind of certainty, and have been governing the fastest technology in human history while running on insufficient water. It is a simple diagnosis.

The Protocol, complete:
One: drink water upon waking, before the first decision. Start the engine before driving it.

Two: before any hard thinking ~ negotiation, budget, border, declaration ~ *drink a glass (of water) and wait twenty minutes*. The water needs the time to reach the deep places. So do you.

Three: make no major decision after wine, after heat, after long travel, without rehydrating first. Most of history was made in exactly this state.

Four: put a pitcher of water on the table where the decisions happen. Not coffee. Water. Do this and be surprised .

Five: when possible, drink the kind that was not hurried. The kind that took its time becoming clean. It is available here, on the table, in the glass bottle. It has been waiting, at eleven and six-tenths degrees, since a while ago.

~

This protocol will not, on its own, end most problems though. The disease beneath the thirst is speed, and beneath the speed is fear, and water cures neither ~ only time can do that. But thirst is the symptom we can fix today, before the motorcade, at no cost, with the bottle already on the table.

~

A final note on the location of this summit, offered as a compliment to the host nation:

France chose Évian. Évian is the town whose entire genius is patient water ~ fifteen years in the rock, a constant temperature, a mineral honesty that has not changed since 1826. France set this summit beside the one place on earth that embodies, in its geology, everything the summit was trying to govern: the difference between the quick water and the slow water, between the thing that skips the rock and the thing that earns its clarity in the dark.

And then ~ *being French, being gracious, being a civilization that has made the cultivation of transformed things into its highest art* ~ France opened the cellar and served the wine. As any good host would. As only a culture this confident in the depth of its own patience could.

The water was on the table too. It is always on the table. It will wait.

~

The dreamer set the brief down. The motorcade was ready. The glass bottle stood on the table, half-full, eleven and six-tenths degrees, the same temperature it had been all night and would be for the rest of the day and the rest of the year, regardless of what was decided in the cars.

The dreamer drank it. All of it. Slowly.

Then picked up the usual brief, and the unusual one, and the briefcase with the wet shorts folded inside it ~ and went down to the motorcade, and was, by twenty minutes, a slightly better version of the person who had fallen asleep the night before. Somewhere in a sealed case, all the way home and for years after, a pair of summer shorts dried slowly, keeping the shape of a night that the record will insist never happened.

SEVEN PLUS ONE ~ Elastic Minds Lab.

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~ Characters are archetypes, not portraits.
Évian water facts are real. The wine is rumored.
The island is a dream.
The brief was found on a table.
The rain was intentional.
Everything offered as possible, not definite. ~

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